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AMIDA DHARMA



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This book is dedicated to all sentient beings. May they make indestructible connections with Amida Buddha, entrust to Him, say His Name (NamoAmida Bu) and wish to be born in His Pure Land.

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Introduction

Jodo Shinshu Buddhism or Amida Dharma is the Path to Nirvana (perfect Enlightenment) through faith in Amida Buddha. This Path was taught by Shakyamuni Buddha (the historical Buddha) and was later transmitted to our times by a long series of Masters and teachers among which I mention Shinran Shonin (1173-1262), the founder of this school in Japan and Rennyo Shonin (1415-1499), the restorer.

The words "Jodo Shinshu" mean "the True Pure Land School" and Dharma means teaching. Amida Dharma is the teaching about the unconditional salvation offered by Amida Buddha. With the help of this Buddha called Amida we are born in His Pure Land (His sphere of influence) after death where we attain perfect Enlightenment (Nirvana).

This book represents the essence of Jodo Shinshu Buddhist teaching as it is taught at Amidaji temple and in our international Sangha. Its study is an obligation for any follower. If somebody can't read it, it will be read to him by the priest or one of the Dharma colleagues.

Amida Dharma contains the minimum knowledge required for a member of Amidaji. It is a simple book without quotations and technical terms¹, limited to what

¹ When a technical term appears in the text, like for example, shinjin (faith), jiriki (self power), Tariki (The Power of Amida Buddha), etc, they are followed by the explanation in brackets, exactly as in this footnote.

is strictly necessary to understand the world of repeated births and deaths (samsara) and the Path to escape from it.

The text is divided into fourteen fascicles, each fascicle containing numbered passages for an easy lecture and quotation, following the example of classical texts.

The reader is offered explanations about karma and samsara, what is Buddha nature and what is Nirvana or Enlightenment, who are Shakyamuni and Amida, what is faith, what one needs to do to have faith, how one should listen to the teaching and how should one behave in relation with faith (the eight precepts of faith), etc. I also explain what one can obtain in this life through faith in Amida and the benefits of being born after death in the Pure Land.

At the end of the book I present the moral ideal taught by Shakyamuni in twelve points.

The fundamental teaching that Amida Dharma is not a justification or an encouragement to do evil appears in the *Larger Sutra*, sections 31-40, which I explained in my *Commentary on the Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life*, as well as in Shinran's writing, like *Matto sho* and *Tannisho* where it is clearly stated that we should not eat poison (do evil deeds) because we have the antidote (unconditional salvation offered by Amida). Thus, we must not think that because Amida saves us as we are, we should stop any effort to have a good behavior towards others. What this right behavior means from the Buddhist point of view is explained in many sutras and

treatises from which I made a detailed summary to offer the reader a daily guide of what to do and what to avoid.

These 14 fascicles are explained in greater depth in my other books as they contain teachings that are fully developed, with many quotes and passages from Shakyamuni Buddha and the Masters of our tradition. I invite you to read and study these books if you wish to deepen the teaching presented here.

No matter what you read during your life you must keep in mind the content of this book which is the essence of the Path towards birth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha. All that is written here is in harmony with the Primal Vow of Amida and the intention of all Buddhas.

Namo Amida Bu

Jōshō Adrian Cîrlea
March 14, 2564 Buddhist Era(2020 C.E.),
Year of the Metal Rat
Amidaji International Temple

Fascicle 1

Karma and Samsara

1. There is a natural law, a supreme law, uncreated and the same for all. It is called karma and it means that everything is cause and effect.
2. Thoughts and intentions represent the karma of mind, words are the karma of speech and the actions are the karma of body. These are the three types of karma. They define and create all beings and they also determine the environment in which we are born.
3. All that we think, speak or do will affect our personal history. What we are now is the result of what we thought, said or did in the past, in another lifetime or in the present life; and what we think, speak and do in the present will create us in the future.
4. Birth, life and death must be understood through the law of cause and effect. All that exists has a cause and any cause will have an effect. In every second of our life we harvest the fruits of our thoughts, words and deeds and plant new seeds by what we think, say and do. This is the right way to understand the world around us and what happens to us.
5. We are born and reborn from our karma, that is, from our own actions. Even the outside world is but the manifestation of collective karma. Our world, this plane of existence, as well as all other worlds have karma as their origin. Various universes and the beings that

populate them do not appear by chance, nor are they created by a god, but are the effect of past causes.

6. Samsara, that is, the world of repeated births and deaths, is the collective dream of all beings drowned in delusion and ignorance. It appears from the collective karma of beings which inhabit it. Just like ordinary dreams are the manifestation of thoughts, deeds and words said during daytime, what we think, do and say gives rise to the collective dream in which we are born and die repeatedly.

7. Various universes and worlds appear, disappear and reappear from the collective karma of beings. As long as beings are still asleep in delusion and blind passions, the samsaric dream will never end.

8. In the moment of death, personal karma determines the form, that is, the body our mind will have in the next birth.

9. As slaves to their own delusions, blind passions and karma, unenlightened beings are born again and again in various places. There are six realms of existence which appear due to individual and collective karma of beings who are born in them. These are: the hells, the realms of hungry ghosts, animals, humans, demigods (asuras) and gods (devas).

10. All beings are born, die and are reborn again in the six samsaric realms depending on their karma and their

existence is accompanied with various kinds of suffering, obstacles and delusions.

11. Birth in the hell realms is caused by actions, speech and thoughts motivated by hate and cruelty. In hells beings suffer from fire, cold and unimaginable tortures. All these punishments are not applied by living beings nor decided by some kind of supreme judge, but are the manifestations of individual and collective karma of the beings born there. The monsters who appear in the hell realms and torture beings are in fact, manifested by the sinners evil karma just as in nightmares we are tortured by beings who manifest from our own thoughts.

Although life in hells lasts very long, nobody stays there forever. Beings remain in the hell realms until the evil karma which brought them there is exhausted, then they die and are reborn in other states of existence depending on the various types of karma they accumulated in the past.

12. Birth in the realm of hungry spirits (pretas) is caused by actions, speech and thoughts motivated by greed and avarice.

Hungry spirits suffer from hunger and thirst. Because in their human life they were never satisfied no matter how many riches they gathered, after death they will desperately search for food and water, but they will never find it.

Although life as a hungry spirit lasts very long, nobody stayes like that forever. Beings remain in the realm of hungry spirits until the evil karma which brought them there is exhausted, then they die and are reborn in other

states of existence depending on the various types of karma they accumulated in the past

13. Birth in animal form is caused by actions, speech and thoughts motivated by ignorance and instinct. Those who live only for eating, drinking and sex, are born as animals.

Animals suffer from eating one another, they are also exploited, hunted or raised for their meat and other products made from their bodies.

Beings stay in animal form until the evil karma which brought them there is exhausted, then they die and are reborn in other states of existence depending on the various types of karma they accumulated in the past.

14. Hells, the world of hungry spirits and animals are called the lower realms of existence because their suffering is much greater than in the worlds of humans, demigods and gods.

15. Birth in the human world is caused by virtuous actions, speech and thoughts stained by all the mind's poisons, with no particular poison predominating.

Humans are affected by eight types of suffering: birth, old age, disease, death, encountering what is unpleasant, separation from what is pleasant, not getting what one wants and the suffering associated with all mental and physical elements that define a human being (body, sensations, perceptions, thoughts and mental states).

Beings stay in human form until the karma which brought them there is exhausted, then they die and are

reborn in other states of existence depending on various types of karma they accumulated.

16. Birth as a demigod (asura) is caused by virtuous actions, speech and thoughts stained by jealousy and rivalry, by doing something good only to prove one's superior qualities.

Although demigods experience various pleasures and abundance which are far superior to those of humans, they are constantly tormented by anger, jealousy, quarreling and fighting. Life as an Asura is a pitiful one – filled as it is with joys and pleasures more than a human can imagine, but they are not able to enjoy it due to envy and conflicts.

Although life as a demigod lasts very long, nobody stays like that forever. Beings remain in the world of demigods until the karma which brought them there is exhausted, then they die and are reborn in other states of existence depending on various types of karma they accumulated.

17. Birth as a god (deva) is caused by virtuous actions, speech and thoughts stained by pride. The pleasures and happiness of gods are far superior to other samsaric beings, but even these are not the true happiness which only comes through freedom from repeated births and deaths.

Although life as a god lasts very long, nobody stays like that forever. Beings remain in the world of gods until the karma which brought them there is exhausted, then they die and are reborn in other states of existence depending on various types of karma they accumulated.

The passing of a god is very painful as it is preceded by traumatic physical changes and the awareness that pleasures enjoyed until then came to an end. You can compare their situation with a rich person who has lived in luxury since birth and is suddenly thrown into the street and forced to eat garbage.

There are other types of gods which are superior to those mentioned here; some of them are very spiritually advanced, nevertheless they are not free from samsara as they are also subject to repeated births and deaths and various types of sufferings within samsara.

18. Among the samsaric places of existence, birth in human form is the most appropriate because it represents a favorable balance between pain and pleasure – not too much pleasure as in the realms of the gods and demigods, and not too much pain as in the animal world, hungry spirits (pretas) and hells. This makes listening to and following the Buddhist teaching easier. Who can really focus on Dharma when he is burned in the fires of hell, tormented by hunger and thirst like the pretas or hunted for meat and with a mind that is limited by ignorance like in the case of animals? Also, who can focus on the Dharma when he enjoys the intoxicating pleasures of gods and demigods, and is always attracted by new desires and distractions?

19. Very few beings are reborn again in human form after they die, and non-human beings are far more numerous than humans. We can easily realize this by comparing the insects on this planet with the humans. Even if we are now more than seven billion people, insects will

always be more numerous than us. Also, the lower states of existence (hells, the realm of hungry spirits and animals) receive more beings than our human plane. When people focus on hate motivated activities they easily plant a karmic connection with the hell realm, thus being born after death in one of the hells. In the same way, it's easier to let oneself be dominated by greed or avarice and open the gate to the hungry spirits or to become dominated by instincts and be reborn in animal form, than to plant the good karmic seeds of human rebirth.

20. Samsara is like an immense wheel which turns endlessly. Now we have a good karma and we are born in a superior state of existence, as a human, demigod or god, but in a next life we do evil deeds again and we are reborn in the lower realms of existence (in the hell realms, the realm of hungry spirits and the animal realm). There is not a single place in samsara where we haven't been born at least once, since we have been transmigrating in samsara since the beginningless past, and we shall remain trapped in this wheel of birth and death if we continue to be slaves of delusions, blind passions and karma. Also, there is no being in samsara who hasn't been our father, mother, brother, sister or friend at a certain point in a previous existence through our long wandering in samsara.

Until we escape this endless cycle of repeated births and deaths there is no true and everlasting happiness.

21. Nothing which exists in samsara lasts forever: the outside universe, the bodies of beings in various states of

existence, social status, riches, or our so-called “spiritual realizations.”

22. The great world systems with their various realms and planets which appear due to the collective karma of beings living in them will disintegrate one day. Then, other worlds will appear and will disappear, too. Even the gods with immense life spans will die like any other samsaric being. Rulers of vast celestial realms or leaders of men are equally subject to death and their kingdoms will disappear sooner or later. Rich and poor, successful people and losers, will all leave their present bodies and will not take anything with them from their success or failure.

Death is indeed, the great equalizer.

23. If we really understand death and we become aware that it is always near, ready to strike at any moment, then we will stop wasting our time in mundane matters and we will make the liberation from samsaric existence and the study of Amida-Dharma which leads us outside the cycle of death and suffering in samsara our top priority.

Fascicle2

Buddha nature and escape from samsara

- 1.Escaping the cycle of repeated births and deaths or waking up from the samsaric dream is called the attainment of Buddhahood. As in the case of a precious jewel buried underneath a mountain of trash, all beings have Buddha nature, hidden under thousands of layers of delusions and blind passions.
2. Just like all seeds have the natural potential to become trees, all sentient beings have the natural potential to become Buddhas, that is, to awaken to their own Buddha nature. Beyond the various layers of our delusory personality, the Buddha nature is the true reality, uncreated and indestructible, the treasure hidden in every one of us. When it's discovered, the causes of suffering and repeated births and deaths are annihilated and the one who attained it becomes himself a savior and guide of all beings that are still caught in the slavery of samsara.
- 3.Buddhahood is also called perfect Enlightenment because it is the same with turning on the light in a room which was in the dark for eons. By attaining this state, beings become Buddhas. It is also called Nirvana because it means to extinguish the fire of blind passions, delusion and ignorance and the attainment of perfect happiness which does not depend on anything.

4. The word "Buddha" means "The Awakened One" because He has waked up from the dream of birth and death.

There are many Buddhas as many beings waked up and attained Buddhahood since the beginningless past. These Buddhas are supreme in the universe and, having Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Compassion act as awakeners of others.

The methods through which they try to wake up beings from samsara and the teachings they offer for the benefit of sleeping beings are the Path of the Buddha.

5. No god, spirit or divine character of any religion is superior to a Buddha and no religion or spiritual path is equal to the teachings of the Buddhas. This is why we, the Buddhist disciples take refuge only in the Buddha, in His Dharma and the community of His true disciples (Sangha) and why we do not venerate and we do not depend on any divine character outside of Buddhism.

Fascicle 3

Shakyamuni Buddha and Amida Buddha

1. Human history, as we know it, is only a very small fraction of the endless and inconceivable time of the universe. This means that many world systems and beings living in them had existed before this earth and will continue to exist after its disappearance. Thus, in the beginningless past a great number of Buddhas appeared in various worlds and will continue to appear in the never ending future.
2. The Enlightened Person who taught the Dharma during our present human history was Shakyamuni Buddha and the teachings and methods presented by Him were transmitted to us in the form of sutras (discourses).
3. Different Buddhist schools were created based on various sutras (discourses). Our Jodo Shinshu school (the True Pure Land School) which we also call Amida Dharma was formed based on the *The Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life (Larger Sutra)*. A lineage of Masters from India, China, and Japan transmitted and explained the teaching of this sutra, among which the most important is Shinran Shonin, the founder of this school in Japan, and Rennyo Shonin, the restorer.
4. The *Larger Sutra* was considered by Shinran Shonin to be the most important teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha's lifetime, and the main reason for His appearance in our world. In this sutra He told the story of Amida Buddha

and His Pure Land, encouraging all beings to entrust to Him, say His Name (NamoAmida Bu) and wish to be born there.

5. As Shakyamuni told us, Amida was a monk named Dharmakara, in another era long before ours, who made the aspiration to become a Buddha. But what differentiates Him from other Buddhas is that He made special vows which promise salvation (Buddhahood) not only for those capable of hard practices and virtues, but for all, and especially for those who are incapable of any practice. Thus, He promised the creation of a special Pure Land named Sukhavati in which everybody can have access and, once born there, they will themselves become Buddhas, completely free from birth and death and capable to save other beings. According to His Primal Vow (the 18th Vow), the only condition for birth in His Pure Land is to have faith in Him, say His Name (NamoAmida Bu) and wish to be born there after death.

6. At the moment Dharmakara attained supreme Enlightenment and became Amida Buddha, His vows and His Pure Land became real and effective in the salvation of beings.

7. Amida, which is the Name of this Buddha, means Infinite Life and Infinite Light. Thus, Amida is the Buddha of Infinite Life and Infinite Light.

8. Unlike Shakyamuni, Amida is not a historical figure, so He does not belong to human history as we know it, but a transcendent Buddha who attained Enlightenment

many eons ago, in the distant past, even before the apparition of our universe. However, He is as real as Shakyamuni or any Buddha of any time as all Buddhas remain forever active in the salvation of sentient beings.

9. In order to prove His existence and to make us, disciples of future times, entrust to Him, Shakyamuni Buddha showed Amida and His Pure Land to Ananda and all those gathered on Vulture Peak in India who listened that day to the *Larger Sutra*. Thus, all the assembly saw and enjoyed the splendor of His Powerful Light. They also saw the glory and happiness of enlightened beings born there and they further transmitted the good news of the unconditional salvation this Buddha offers to all beings irrespective of their spiritual capacities.

10. Because it is the easiest method through which all beings, no matter their capacities, can attain freedom from samsara, all Buddhas, not only Shakyamuni, urge us to entrust ourselves to Amida, say His Name in faith (Namo Amida Bu) and wish to be born in His Pure Land after death.

11. The environment in which we now live is the product of our personal karma and the collective karma of all beings. This impure common karma gave rise to an impure environment that also influences us and in which it is hard to have a true spiritual evolution. We ourselves are sick, our fellow beings are sick and the environment we inhabit is also sick. This is why we are urged to aspire to be born after death, in the Pure Land. This land

is the healthy enlightened realm of Amida, a suitable environment which is not the product of evil karma but of His pure karmic merits. Once born in such a sane environment our insanity is cured instantly, our delusions are naturally melted like ice meeting fire, and Enlightenment appears naturally.

12. Samsaric or unenlightened beings are like seeds dropped in infertile soil. Although the potentiality of any seed is to become a tree, if you place it in poor soil, devoid of any good nutrients, and in the presence of various bad weeds, the seed will not grow.

Just like the seed, the potentiality of any being is to become a Buddha, but because we live in this samsaric world, itself the effect and echo of our own evil karma, we cannot grow and transform ourselves into Buddhas. This is exactly why we need to let Amida take us to His Pure Land. That Land is the best soil for seeds like us to quickly develop their natural potential and become Buddhas.

13. Unlike the various samsaric planes of existence, the Pure Land is the soil (realm) of Enlightenment, the perfect garden manifested by Amida Buddha where everything is conducive to Enlightenment. So, we should all simply entrust to Him and wish to be planted (reborn) there, where by receiving all the necessary nutrients and by being free from all bad weeds (obstacles), we'll naturally transform ourselves into Trees of Enlightenment.

Fascicle 4

Personal power and Amida's Power

1. The teachings and practices taught by Shakyamuni Buddha can be classified in two categories, depending on the capacities of beings: the path of personal power (jiriki) and the path of reliance on the Power of Amida Buddha (Tariki).
2. The path of personal power is also called the difficult path because it refers to following the Buddhist practices and attaining Enlightenment through one's own efforts. It is a path which often includes retiring from the world.
3. The Path of reliance on the Power of Amida Buddha (the Path of Faith) is also called the easy path because it depends exclusively on the unconditional help offered by Amida who guides the faithful to His Pure Land where Enlightenment is spontaneously attained.
4. The various teachings and practices of the self power path can be followed only by people of superior capacities, so they have a limited relevance.
5. The Path of reliance on the Power of Amida Buddha, also called Amida Dharma, can be followed by anybody, no matter his or her spiritual capacities, and even by the lowest of the low. For this reason it has universal relevance. All beings can be saved through it.
6. The more time passes since the physical presence of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lower the capacities of beings

are, as they become more and more incapable to follow the paths of self power. In this age of moral and religious decadence, of powerful attachements and blind passions, the only path that can save us from repeated births and deaths is the Path of Faith in the Salvific Power of Amida Buddha.

7. We must become aware of the impermanence of our bodies and the world we live in, but we must also never forget about the impermanence of our so-called „spiritual realizations.”

This truth may be hard to swallow but Amida Dharma teaches us that our spiritual evolution is a delusion. What we think we obtained now, we can lose in the next moment. The ego cannot evolve; all it really does is to constantly adapt itself to various coarse or refined attachments. From material pleasures to spiritual satisfaction and false Nirvanas, the possibilities of deceit are endless for those who rely on personal power.

8. If we look to our lives from the perspective of physical impermanence and the impermanence of our so-called „spiritual realizations” we can see things clearly and ask ourselves the right questions. What would happen to us if we die today? You, the reader or listener of these lines, must ask yourself this question: what will happen to you if you die today? Your so called virtues are weak and insignificant, which means that your next rebirth, that can come even now while you are reading these lines is uncertain if you do not rely on Amida.

9. Especially because you are an ordinary person you can't afford not to be sure where you go after death. If you have met Amida's helping hand, accept it immediately without hesitation. You must not assume any risk related to the essential matter of your future rebirth and you must not allow death to catch you unprepared, that is, without faith.

Fascicle 5

The eight elements of faith

1. Faith (shinjin) in Amida Buddha, the saying of His Name (Namo Amida Bu) and the wish to be born in His Pure Land after death, are the three important things Amida Buddha asks from us. All this three elements are in fact manifestations of faith (shinjin) because the follower who has faith in Amida will certainly say His Name and desire to be with Him in His Pure Land. So, the saying of the Name and the wish to be born there are expressions of faith. Only a person who has true faith in Amida Buddha will say the Name in an authentic way and wish to be born in His Pure Land.
2. When one has faith (shinjin), one is convinced that Amida Buddha and His Pure Land exist, and that the Promise He made in His Primal Vow is true, so one simply entrusts to this Buddha and wishes to go to His Pure Land after death. Saying Namo Amida Bu (Nembutsu) often or seldom means exactly this – “I entrust to Amida Buddha/I take refuge in Amida Buddha and I wish to go to His Pure Land”. It also means, “Homage to Amida Buddha” and “Thank you Amida Buddha for saving me as I am”.
3. Faith in Amida Buddha is not a special state of mind, nor something complicated that we must develop inside ourselves, but a simple trust in Amida, that is, to accept as true the promise He made in His Primal Vow where He said that those who entrust to Him, say His Name in faith and wish to be born in His Pure Land will go there.

In the same way that we trust a mechanic to fix our car or a carpenter to build our fence because we don't know how to do it, we trust Amida to take us to His Pure Land where we attain perfect Enlightenment because we cannot go there by ourselves.

4. In the exact moment we entrust to Amida Buddha we enter the stage of non-retrogression, that is, no matter what happens to us we are assured of birth in the Pure Land. Just like all rivers flow to the ocean, all beings who entrust to Amida will inevitably be born in His Pure Land after death. Once we put our faith in Amida, nothing constitutes an obstacle for our birth there, not even our evil karma. This is why this stage is called, non-retrogression.

5. To explain it in detail, we can say that faith in Amida Buddha has eight elements (aspects):

- To accept the actual, literal existence of Amida Buddha and His Pure Land
- To accept the story of Amida Buddha as told by Shakyamuni Buddha in the *Larger Sutra* (and as it is explained in this book)
- To wish to be born in the Pure Land for the attainment of perfect Enlightenment
- To have the twofold profound conviction, which means to know that you are a person of deep karmic limitations, incapable of attaining Buddhahood through your own power, and that

only Amida Buddha can save you through His Vow Power, without asking anything from you.

- To accept the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha without any doubt and be sure of your birth in the Pure Land
- To accept that birth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha takes place after death
- To say the Name of Amida Buddha
- To not mix Nembutsu and devotion towards Amida Buddha with other faiths and practices from inside or outside the Buddha Dharma

The eight elements are part of the mind/heart of faith (shinjin). They come naturally to a person of faith. Anything else, like having a calm, focused and undistracted mind in your daily life, being a virtuous or non-virtuous person, having special or mystical experiences is irrelevant and not important in relation with faith in Amida Buddha.

6. Without accepting the actual, literal existence of Amida Buddha there can be no true faith, no true salvation and no real birth in His Pure Land. If we have faith in someone, then it means we are sure beyond any doubt that he is reliable and that he will keep his promise. Also, to believe in someone's promise means that we accept his existence, too. Promises can be made by living persons, in our case by a living, existing Amida Buddha, not by material objects or fictional characters. Thus, we must accept Amida as a living Buddha who

can hear, see and save us by taking us to His Pure Land after death.

7. Amida Buddha is always with us, seeing us, hearing us. This is not a metaphor, but the truth. Amida Buddha is in three places at the same time: 1) in His Buddha nature, 2) in His Pure Land in transcendent form, and 3) everywhere in the universe where there are beings that need to be saved. Everywhere we go, Amida Buddha is accompanying us. Even if we don't actually see Amida Buddha's manifestations with our unenlightened eyes (although visions can happen), it does not mean Amida is not there with us, embracing us with His blessed Light.

8. The Pure Land is a real, enlightened place where we'll actually be reborn after the death of this physical body. Amida Buddha wishes to save us all, but He doesn't take us to His Pure Land by force, so if we do not wish to go there or we do not accept the existence of that enlightened realm or the existence of Amida, then we'll not go there. Nobody can go to a place which he thinks doesn't exist and nobody can be saved by someone who is considered an imaginary person. We must reflect on this and accept the existence of Amida Buddha and His Pure Land.

9. The *Larger Sutra* explains in our human language the apparition of Amida and His Pure Land in terms of cause and effect and cannot be denied, especially because Shakyamuni's main reason for coming to this world was to teach this sutra

10.In the *Larger Sutra* we acknowledge the testimony of Ananda and all those gathered on Vulture Peak to hear this sutra and who literally saw Amida Buddha and His Pure Land in a vision, thus attesting of their existence. Shakyamuni Buddha said that we must accept this sutra in faith, so we should do this, and not criticize or change it according to our likes or dislikes

11.Even if we did not read the *Larger Sutra* but hear the teaching from somebody and accept the existence of Amida Buddha, entrust to Him, say His Name and wish to go to His Pure Land when we die, then we automatically accept the sutra, because its main intention is exactly to teach the existence of Amida and His Pure Land, as well as His method of salvation - faith, Nembutsu of faith (saying of His Name) and wish to be born there.

12.The goal of Buddhism is to become a Buddha. Not to paint this life in different colors, not to become a smart or interesting kind of Buddhist, but to become a Buddha. The Buddhist path is not a method of relaxation or a tablet for headache, something like “how can we become happier and calmer people” or a recipe for momentary happiness, but a road to Buddhahood or complete Freedom for us and all beings.

13.It is of utmost importance for those who enter the Buddhist path to have the aspiration to become a Buddha. Without this aspiration there is no Buddhism. If we don't want or don't feel the urgency of complete freedom from the many sufferings of repeated births and

deaths, then Buddhism will remain for us only an object of study, an interesting lecture of mythology or an intellectual delight.

14. We must understand that we go to the Pure Land of Amida Buddha in order to become Buddhas ourselves, so we should not confuse the Pure Land with some kind of heavenly realm where we enjoy riches and sensual pleasures.

15. There is no greater treasure than the attainment of freedom from the repeated births and deaths. No riches or samsaric pleasures can compare with it.

16. Faith in Amida Buddha means a twofold profound conviction: to know that we are people of deep karmic limitations, incapable of attaining Buddhahood through our own power and that only Amida Buddha can save us through His Vow Power without asking anything from us. Thus, you must take refuge in Amida Buddha with the attitude of somebody who is about to die now, in this very moment, without a single second left and without the power to purify your own actions and negative karma.

17. Generally speaking, we can change our karma and thus decide to act in such and such a way, influencing our own destiny, but do we really always act as we wish? Suppose there's a person who drinks a lot since childhood and has now 40 years of alcoholism. Can he give up alcohol just like that, by a simple act of will? Or

in the case of someone who smokes since early childhood, can he really give up smoking over night?

18. We see from experience that many smokers, alcoholics or drug abusers cannot give up their bad habits so easily, some of them even ending their lives without being able to stop their harmful behavior. How much more powerful is the influence of past habitual karma!

This habitual past karma is not what we did in a habitual manner in a single lifetime, but what we did and were concentrated on in many lifetimes. If it is hard to put an end to the habitual karma of smoking which lasts only for twenty or thirty years, how much harder or even impossible would it be to stop the various bad karmic tendencies of many lifetimes!

19. Amida Dharma doesn't deny free will in changing karma, but it insists on the truth that this will is so much weakened by the habitual karma of past lives that it becomes almost incapable of really changing something.

20. When we have became accustomed for many eons and long kalpas with living in ignorance, hate, greed, jealousy, attachments, how could we not be influenced by this habitual evil karma also in this life and how could we end all these perpetual miseries just by force of will? We all know that a long time of drug abuse leads to dependency; a state in which the personal will to change is extremely limited and one needs immediate help from a specialist. We must consider that we have taken the

drugs of delusion for many lifetimes since the beginingless past!

21. On the Nembutsu Path we start by recognizing our own incapacities and then we accept the medicine, which is the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha. We recognize that we are so sick that we can no longer rely on ourselves and we agree to apply the only medicine that works in dependency cases like ours.

22. The cause of our attainment of birth in the Pure Land is Amida Buddha. Because we are carried by the karmic Power of Amida we can reach His Pure Land. If the Pure Land was the effect of our own karma, then we could naturally go there whenever we wish, but because it is Amida's Enlightened realm, we can reach it only through Amida's Power. This is why we should give up the idea of "deserving" to be born in the Pure Land. Our so-called "good karma" has nothing in common with the Pure Land. It is extremely important to understand that the bridge to the Pure Land comes from the Pure Land, and it is Amida's creation (manifestation). We simply cannot create something in our samsaric and unenlightened mind that can bring us to the Pure Land of Enlightenment. So, let us relax and let Amida do His saving work on us, carrying us there when we die.

23. After hearing the Primal Vow you should have no doubt. Think that the Primal Vow is reliable and that Amida Buddha will keep His promise and take you to His Pure Land if you entrust yourself to Him, say His Name and wish to go there.

24. To have no doubt, also means that you have abandoned forever any idea of relying on your self power in the matter of birth in the Pure Land

25. Birth in the Pure Land through the Gate of the Primal Vow means the attainment of Buddhahood and acquiring the special transcendental qualities of the Enlightened Ones, which cannot be found in our present samsaric minds and bodies. This is why we must leave this unenlightened environment, which is itself the effect of our collective karma, delusions and sins, and be reborn in the enlightened and safe environment of Amida Buddha where there is no obstacle for attaining Emancipation.

26. The genuine saying of Amida's Name comes naturally after entrusting to Him. Thus, the Nembutsu is both an expression of faith and gratitude due to the fact you are saved as you are by Amida Buddha.

27. One who is sincerely in love will say "I love you" often or seldom, and wish to be with the person he loves. Similarly, a person who sincerely entrusts to Amida Buddha will express this faith by saying His Name and wish to be born in His Pure Land. How often or seldom one says "I love you" to the person one loves is of no importance, as long as love is there, in one's heart. In the same way, any number of Nembutsu is equally good as long as genuine faith in Amida Buddha is present. We should not be obsessed with the numbers of recitations, but simply entrust ourselves to Amida Buddha for our

birth in His Enlightened Realm, and enjoy the Nembutsu in a relaxed way.

28. The Name of Amida can be said in any circumstance, time and place, whether sitting or standing, lying down, walking or doing any activity – there is no inadequate situation for saying the Name.

29. The Name of Amida can be said with an ordinary, impure and agitated mind as ours and this will not affect in anyway the salvation offered by Him.

30. A person of genuine faith will not trust, nor rely on the so-called "god" of the monotheists or any other gods or spirits of various religions.

31. Also as devotees of Amida's Primal Vow we will never mix Nembutsu with other practices from inside or outside the Buddha Dharma, but focus exclusively on Amida Buddha and His Name

32. All we need to do for our attainment of Buddhahood in the Pure Land is mentioned in the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha: to say the Name in faith and wish to be born there. Nothing else. No meditation practices, nor this or that special virtue are mentioned in the Primal Vow; just entrust yourself to Amida, say His Name and wish to be born in His Pure Land.

Now please, pay attention: to say the Name of Amida, and not of other Buddhas or religious figures outside Buddhism, to have faith in Amida and wish to be born in

His Pure Land, not in the land of other Buddhas. This is extremely important.

33. Among all the pure lands in the ten directions we chose to go in the Pure Land of Amida, and from among all the Buddhas in the ten directions we chose to entrust to and say the Name of Amida only. This is not because other Buddhas are not worthy of devotion and respect, or that other Buddhist practices are not good in themselves; It is just because other Buddhas do not have vows for making evil people like us be born so easily in their Pure Lands, and because only Amida made the Vow to do so

34. In our everyday life, depending on the result we wish to achieve, we must follow specific instructions. If for example, we want to go from A to B we follow the course from A to B, not the course from A to C. In the same way, if we want to reach the Pure Land of Amida, then we follow exclusively the indications mentioned in His Primal Vow: faith (shinjin), Nembutsu (saying of the Name) and the wish to be born there, which are all expressions of faith

35. For us, ordinary unenlightened people, it is extremely important to be concentrated on one thing only and not let ourselves be distracted by many practices belonging to different teachings and even different Dharma gates. Focus is a key point in our religious life. Only when we reach Buddhahood we'll be able to play as we like with all methods, but until then we must stay humble and let go of everything that is not related with the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha.

36. Although it might be hard for some who are still attached to the previous practices they performed before they encountered Amida Dharma, they must understand that if they want to truly follow this Path it is necessary to be in agreement with the requirements of the Primal Vow and abandon all elements that are not in accordance with it. If we do that, we please Amida and all Buddhas, including Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha. This is because all Buddhas praise the Name of Amida and encourage beings to say it and be concentrated on it, wishing to be born in that specific land. If they do otherwise, even if they think that by doing that they please as many Buddhas as possible, they, in fact, scatter their minds in many directions and fail to observe the intentions of all the Awakened Ones.

37. Amida himself promised in His 17th Vow that His Name will be praised by all Buddhas, which means that all Buddhas will encourage beings to say it in faith and will act as witnesses to this method of salvation offered by Amida Buddha. Because of this, the followers who say Amida's Name in faith are both the disciples of Amida and all Buddhas.

Fascicle 6

The eight precepts of faith

1.Those who wish to be in harmony with the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha and to protect the transmission of true faith for other generations, helping themselves and others to not fall into wrong views, must have faith themselves and posses the eight elements of faith. They must also follow the eight precepts of faith.

2.The first precept of faith:

A true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas shall not himself deny, or encourage others to deny the actual, literal existence of Amida Buddha and His Pure Land. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of denying the existence of Amida Buddha and His Pure Land. As a true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas he must have devotion and faith in Amida Buddha, always helping sentient beings to entrust to Him and aspire to be born in His Pure Land.

3. The second precept of faith:

A true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas shall not himself deny or encourage others to deny the story of Amida Buddha as told by Shakyamuni in the *Larger Sutra* (and as presented in this book). He must not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of denying it. As a true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas he must accept in faith the *Larger Sutra* and the story of Amida Buddha as told by Shakyamuni there, always helping sentient beings to do the same.

4. The third precept of faith:

A true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas shall not himself deny or encourage others to deny the importance of the wish to be born in the Pure Land for the attainment of perfect Enlightenment. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of stopping sentient beings from wishing to be born in the Pure Land for the attainment of perfect Enlightenment. As a true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas he must always encourage sentient beings to wish to be born in the Pure Land for the attainment of perfect Enlightenment.

5. The fourth precept of faith:

A true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas shall not himself deny or encourage others to deny that they are persons of deep karmic limitations, incapable to attain Buddhahood through their own power, and that only Amida Buddha can save them through His Vow Power. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of denying salvation from samsara through Amida's Power. As a true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas he must always encourage sentient beings to recognize themselves as persons of deep karmic limitations, incapable to attain Buddhahood through their own power, and to accept that only Amida Buddha can save them through His Vow Power, without asking anything from them.

6. The fifth precept of faith:

A true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas shall not himself doubt or cause others to doubt the Primal Vow and birth in the Pure Land. He must not create the

causes, conditions, methods or karma of doubting the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha and birth in the Pure Land. As a true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas he must always encourage sentient beings to accept the Primal Vow of Amida without any doubt and be sure of their birth in the Pure Land.

7. The sixth precept of faith:

A true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas shall not himself deny or encourage others to deny that birth in the Pure Land takes place after death. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of denying that birth in the Pure Land takes place after death. As a true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas he must always encourage sentient beings to accept that birth in the Pure Land takes place after death.

8. The seventh precept of faith:

A true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas shall not himself abandon or encourage others to abandon the saying of Amida Buddha's Name (Nembutsu). He must not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of abandoning the saying of the Name of Amida Buddha. As a true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas he must always encourage sentient beings to say the Name of Amida.

9. The eight elements of faith:

A true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas shall not himself mix or encourage others to mix Nembutsu and devotion towards Amida Buddha with other faiths and practices from inside or outside of the Buddha Dharma.

He must not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of mixing Nembutsu and devotion towards Amida Buddha with other faiths and practices from inside or outside of the Buddha Dharma. As a true disciple of Amida and all Buddhas he must always encourage sentient beings to exclusively say the Nembutsu and devote themselves entirely to Amida Buddha.

Fascicle 7

The answer to the Call of Buddha Amida

1.Like the sun who sends its rays everywhere, Amida is calling all beings to entrust to Him; nevertheless some people close the windows of their minds and hearts while others keep them open. But even if you open your window, the rays of light belong to the sun, and not to yourself. It is the same with faith.

2.It is because of Amida that one entrusts to Amida. The echo of Amida's Call in one's heart (faith) is due to the power of the One who calls (Amida).

Some people become open to this Call while others don't. Your openness depends on how karmically mature you are in relation to this Call, which is why in our school we are asked to listen again and again to Amida Dharma until we finally become open to it.

One day, when we are open enough we will finally entrust ourselves to Amida. But this apparition of faith comes from Amida, just like the light which shines in a room after we open the window comes from the rays sent by the sun. The light which illuminates the room of our minds (faith) after we opened the window comes from the rays sent by Amida. Opening the window does not create light (faith). Light is not the product of the window, nor the creation of the one who opens the window. Light comes only from the sun.

3.Faith (shinjin) and Nembutsu are the echoes manifested in us of the powerful Call of Amida. When one is in the

mountains and shouts in a loud voice, you can automatically hear the echo. If you do not shout, no echo can be heard. In the same way, if Amida wouldn't compassionately call to us, there would be no faith and no Nembutsu as an expression of faith.

4. A mother calls her child and the child answers immediately. The answer of the child is due to the mother's call, not to the power of the child. In the same way, faith is not our own creation, but the natural answer to the call of Amida Buddha, the Compassionate Parent of all beings. Because of Amida, we entrust in Amida and say Nembutsu. Only because the mother always sends unconditional love to her child, the child can trust and rely on her. The faith of the child is in fact, the love of the mother which manifests in him. The mother is the one who actually feeds and makes the child grow. A child is nothing without a mother. The power of her love makes him grow, not his own power. In the same way, due to Amida's love and His beneficial influence, we will one day come to entrust to Him and say His Name.

5. Therefore, let us not use faith to increase our pride, but rather to be humble and grateful to Amida for having worked on each one of us since the beginningless past, trying in different ways to draw us to Him and to save us from the suffering of repeated births and deaths.

Fascicle 8

The way to Faith - listening to the teaching

1.If we do not listen deeply to the teaching, but instead we are full of our egos and with ideas of what we think we can achieve through our personal power, or if we are under the influence of various non-Buddhist religions then we cannot receive faith nor say the true Nembutsu which is the natural manifestation of faith.

2.Faith and Nembutsu are not imposed by force in our hearts by Amida Buddha, so if somebody does not show interest in the Buddhist teaching and especially in the teaching on the Primal Vow of Amida then that person cannot entrust to Amida.

3.Here are twelve examples of deep listening to Amida Dharma:

- Think that solving the matter of repeated births and deaths is the most important thing in your life.
- Put aside all other Buddhist or non-Buddhist teachings, philosophies, and opinions and listen (reading is also listening) only to Amida Dharma.
- Put aside what you think you know and listen to what Amida Dharma has to say. Empty your cup (mind) of your so-called, personal "wisdom", and stay open to receive the nectar of Dharma. Consider that you know nothing and that Amida Dharma knows everything.
- Read the most simple and essential texts of our school.
- Listen (or read) with a devotional mind and heart.
- Listen again and again (constantly) in the manner described above.

- Ask questions if you have doubts or if there is something you don't understand. Study the answers carefully and without hurry, and ask again if you need to.
- Engage in a Dharma dialogue (not debates!) with people who are already established in faith and who do not embrace wrong views.
- Think on the testimony of Shakyamuni Buddha himself, and of so many wonderful Masters who accepted the existence of Amida Buddha and the reality of His salvation.
- Always ask Amida Buddha for guidance. Bow to Him, and say His Name even if you are not yet established in faith. No matter how many doubts you have, or how awkward it might be at the beginning, find some time to sit with Amida Buddha and pray to Him for guidance. Give a chance to the idea that He and His salvation are real.
- Think of what you will gain if you accept Amida's salvation. You will be born in the Pure Land at the end of this life and become a Buddha! Your suffering in the repeated births and deaths will be over and you will be capable of truly helping others, especially those with whom you now have powerful attachments, like for example, your parents, brothers, sisters, children, wife or husband, and friends.
- Meditate on what you have to lose if you do not accept the existence of Amida Buddha and the reality of His salvation. The chance you now have to be in a human body and listen to Amida Dharma might not be met in thousands and thousands of lives, so give Amida a chance and practice these twelve examples of listening deeply to Amida Dharma.

Fascicle 9

The five conditions for birth in the Pure Land

1. There are five conditions that someone must meet in order to be born in the Pure Land: karmic good from the past, a good spiritual teacher, Amida's Light, faith (shinjin) and the saying of Amida Buddha's Name (Nembutsu)
2. The good from the past represents our good karma from past lives and this life (prior to the awakening of faith) which manifests itself as an opening or receptive state of mind towards the message of the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha.
In Jodo Shinshu a very important practice is to listen to the teaching. However, a lot of people hear the teaching about the Primal Vow but few are opened to it. This openness is very important in our tradition and it is the manifestation of the karmic good from the past. Also, if you listen again and again to the teaching in this life, thus becoming immersed with all your being in the Dharma, this listening will become a karmic good which one day will make you open to the Primal Vow.
3. The good spiritual teacher is the one who guides us to the Path of reliance on the Primal Vow. He is the messenger who urges us to take refuge in Amida and his apparition is also a manifestation of the good from the past. He can be a person, a book or a sacred text but his message can be received only through the openness I mentioned before.

4. Amida's Light represents the working and the wish of Amida Buddha to save (lead to Enlightenment) all sentient beings drowned in delusion. The manifestation of this work and wish is His Primal Vow.
5. Amida's Light is always present upon beings everywhere, opened or not opened to it. Through His Light Amida tries permanently to influence beings and make them accept His salvation contained in the Primal Vow. Some become opened to it sooner while others will do so in the future, but Amida will continue sending His Light until all samsaric realms become empty and all beings attain Buddhahood.
6. Because of the karmic good from the past, we meet with a good spiritual teacher and we are open to his message – the Primal Vow (Amida's Light). At this very moment the so-called “Awakening of Faith” or the apparition of the entrusting heart (shinjin), takes place. Faith means that the follower accepts the existence of Amida Buddha and relies exclusively on Him for the attainment of birth in the Pure Land.
7. The saying of the Name (NamoAmida Bu) appears at the same time with the Awakening of Faith, as an expression of it and of saying „thank you” to Amida Buddha for saving us exactly as we are. This is the only Nembutsu accepted in our tradition – the Nembutsu of faith and gratitude.
8. The karmic good from the past and the spiritual teacher are only conditions that create a beneficial

environment for Amida's Light to manifest, but they are not the direct causes of our birth in the Pure Land. Only faith (the entrusting heart/shinjin) is the direct cause. When it is said in a text that the Nembutsu is the cause of birth in the Pure Land this refers to the Nembutsu of faith or the Nembutsu as an expression of faith. Only in this way can we say that the Nembutsu is the cause of birth in the Pure Land as well.

9. Faith (shinjin) and the saying of the Name are the manifestations of Amida's Light in the heart of the practitioner, and cannot exist independently of Amida's Light. Only because of Amida's working and His wish to save us (Amida's Light) are we able to entrust ourselves to Amida and say the Nembutsu.

Fascicle 10

The benefits in this life of those who have faith in Amida Buddha

1. The disciple who has faith in Amida is protected and sustained by various spirits, gods and unseen powers who are themselves followers of the Buddha-Dharma
2. The disciple who has faith in Amida is protected by all Buddhas. They accompany him day and night like his own shadow.
3. The disciple who has faith in Amida is protected by the Light of this Buddha's heart. No demon, spirit or evil god can harm him.

Also, those who have faith in Amida will never lose it. We are stable and constant in our faith due to Amida's influence on us, His protection and the protection of all Buddhas. Amida's Power is always working inside our minds and keeping us on the right Path to His Pure Land. A person who has genuine faith in Amida will never fall back to non-Buddhist paths, never embrace wrong views or doubt Amida's salvation. On the contrary, he will, due to Amida's protection and the protection of all Buddhas, be constant in his profound understanding that self-power is useless in attaining supreme Enlightenment, and so he will never waver from true and real faith (shinjin) in Amida.

4. The disciple who has faith in Amida receives the karmic merits of this Buddha in this very life before birth in Amida's Pure Land. The transfer of merits (good

karma) from Amida to the faithful has two aspects: it makes him enter the stage of those assured of birth in the Pure Land where he will attain supreme Enlightenment, and come back to this world, completely free and unaffected by worldly conditions, to guide all beings to the same emancipation he has attained in Amida's Pure Land.

5. To better understand the merit transference from Amida Buddha to us, we can compare it with a blood transfusion, or an organ transplant. When a sick person receives healthy blood or a healthy vital organ he can continue to live, even if until then he was supposed to die. Thus, the blood or the organ he received becomes part of his own body and will function as if it has always been there. In the same way, we, who deserve to be born in the lower realms if we are left at the mercy of our unenlightened karma, by entrusting ourselves to Amida Buddha we receive His karmic merits which imbue our mindstream and leads us securely to His Pure Land. Even if we continue to have delusions and blind passions until we die and we are actually born in the Pure Land, we become united with Amida Buddha from this very life (we enter the stage of non-retrogression), as His own "blood" or enlightened karma circulates now through our veins.

6. When faith enters our heart we receive the pure karmic energy of Amida Buddha. In that instant, our evil karma is cut or sterilized and cannot plant its seed into another life. No matter what we did in the past or will do in the future due to our illusions and attachments, our evil

becomes as good as non-existent once we receive faith and say the Nembutsu of faith. Being ordinary people of grave karmic evil brings us into the attention of Amida's undiscriminating Compassion.

7. Also, due to the influence of Amida we can transform an unpleasant experience into an opportunity to understand life as it is and the Dharma. It doesn't mean that we will no longer have problems, experience lack of material things, or have various difficulties, but that we can understand these unfortunate events as being the effects of our karma, using them to become more aware that this is samsara, the world of suffering, from which we must escape once and for all through birth in the Pure Land. Bad events in our lives can thus be transformed through the light of the Dharma into useful ones – useful for our understanding.

8. Those who have faith in Amida are praised by all Buddhas. Shakyamuni calls them His true companions, wonderful people or white lotus flowers.

9. Those who have faith are happy that their emancipation from the repeated births and deaths does not depend on them, but on Amida, which means this freedom is certain because there is nobody more trustful than Amida.

10. Those who have faith are aware of how hard it is to attain freedom from samsara and how great is the debt of gratitude they owe to Amida who saves them as they are.

This is why they have genuine gratitude like somebody who is saved from a certain death.

11. By receiving faith (shinjin) we become part of the salvation work of Amida Buddha, a link in His chain of Great Compassion. As people of faith, we can naturally influence others towards faith if they are open enough, or at least we can help them make a little connection with Amida. Every person, human or non-human, who knows somebody who has genuine faith in Amida can make a little step further towards Amida.

Not all those who have faith become teachers or priests, but this doesn't mean they can't be living examples of faithful devotees. Also, people of faith can do various activities in the benefit of Amida Dharma by sharing texts related to Amida, supporting true teachers and temples. Any of the actions above are a natural manifestation of the need to repay the benevolence of Amida Buddha and they are also ways in which even ordinary people like us can practice great compassion in this life.

12. By receiving faith (shinjin) and saying the Name of Amida we enter, in this life, in the stage of those assured of birth in the Pure Land, where we'll actually be born after death, and where we'll immediately attain Buddhahood (Nirvana/supreme Enlightenment). This is also called the stage of non-retrogression.

Fascicle 11

The benefits of birth in the Pure Land after death

- 1.Those born in the Pure Land through the Gate of True Faith immediately attain supreme Enlightenment. From the very moment they are born in Amida's Pure Land they stop being ordinary beings subject to karma, repeated births and deaths, or to the various delusions and sufferings that are inherent to samsaric existence because they become all-powerful Buddhas free from all obstacles.
- 2.Unlike samsara, where the bodies of beings differ in beauty, health and lifespan, in the Pure Land they will have glorious and eternal manifestations, full of beauty and endless power. Also, they will be able to travel to any direction of the universe and take whatever form they wish, to help all beings, without actually leaving the Pure Land and without being affected by any suffering. Unlike here, where we are limited by time and space, in the Pure Land there will be no limits or obstacles and therefore, we will be able to be in billions of places at the same time.
- 3.Unlike here, where we can harm others even when we want to help them, after we attain Buddhahood in the Pure Land we will perfectly know the needs of everybody, as well as the right methods to provide guidance and help to any being according to their abilities and levels of understanding.

- 4.In samsara beings hardly remember what they did ten years ago, but in the Pure Land we'll remember all our lives since the beginningless past and we'll also know the past lives of all beings from all corners of the universe.
- 5.Unlike samsara where our senses are limited, after we are born in the Pure Land we will be able to hear the voices and sounds of all the worlds and beings that populate them, we will know their thoughts and speak in any language. Also, we will be able to see everywhere, without any obstacles.
- 6.Unlike now when we are weak and helpless and our powers are limited by these samsaric bodies, after we are born in the Pure Land we will be all-powerful and invincible.
7. After we are born in the Pure Land and attain perfect Enlightenment, we will have no illusions and no sin. Pure and clean, we will move beyond suffering, attaining the supreme happiness that depends on nothing. This is the bliss of dwelling in our Buddha nature.
- 8.After we are born in the Pure Land, we automatically obtain Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Compassion. Through Infinite Wisdom, we will know everything and through Infinite Compassion, there will be no trace of ego in our minds, truly becoming full of love for all beings and capable of understanding and helping them.

9. Out of gratitude to all the Buddhas in the ten directions who guided us to Amida along the beginningless eons, we will travel to their pure lands or to the areas where they preach the Dharma to make offerings to them and to help them in their activities.
10. Any teaching taught by any Buddha from any corner of the universe will be known to us and nothing of what is now hidden will remain in darkness.
11. Many are the qualities we will have after attaining Buddhahood in the Pure Land, but they will be fully known only when we are finally born there. So, let's entrust ourselves to Amida, say His name and wish to be born in that Enlightened place. There is no greater happiness than the state of Buddhahood and we can experience it only in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha.

Fascicle 12

The Three Refuges

1. As disciples of Amida and all Buddhas, our only refuge is Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. When we enter the Buddhist Path and we are welcomed in the community of believers (Sangha) we say the Three Refuges with faith and devotion: „I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha”.
2. For us who follow Amida Dharma or the Dharma Gate of birth in the Pure Land, to take refuge in the Buddha means to take refuge in Amida Buddha. Only through Him can we attain Buddhahood in the Pure Land as He is the only Buddha among all Buddhas who made the Vow of saving everybody, no matter their spiritual capacities.
3. By taking refuge in Amida, we automatically honor and take refuge in Shakyamuni Buddha as the Teacher who showed us the path of Amida Dharma (His main reason for coming into this world) and in all Buddhas in the ten directions, as they all encourage us, teach us and guide us to entrust to Amida Buddha.
4. Taking refuge in the Dharma means to take refuge in the Dharma (teaching) about Amida that was taught by Shakyamuni Buddha and further explained by the Masters of our tradition, especially by Shinran Shonin and Rennyo Shonin. This Dharma on Amida Buddha is the Amida Dharma, which is the teaching contained in

this book. This Amida Dharma book is the summary of the Dharma on Amida Buddha offered by Shakyamuni and the Masters of our tradition.

5. By taking refuge in the Dharma, we automatically reject wrong views or opinions that contradict the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Masters of our tradition as they are explained in this book.

6. Taking refuge in the Dharma means that we make the vow of putting the Dharma higher than our own unenlightened opinions and ideas. We receive and transmit to others only the teaching left to us by Shakyamuni and the Masters of our tradition as it is explained in this book.

7. All genuine Buddhist teachings and practices come from Shakyamuni and various Buddhas, so they are part of our enlarged family (Sangha) heritage, deserving our respect and appreciation. However, we follow only the teaching on Amida Buddha and it is only in this teaching that we take refuge.

8. Also, we do not mix the Buddha Dharma with various religious systems from the past or present. Buddhism is the medicine prescribed to us by the Buddha, who is supreme among the teachers of all religions and all times and it is a grave mistake to mix His teaching with those of other paths.

9. So, we abandon all non-Buddhist teachings and select the Buddha Dharma. Next, among all Buddha's

teachings, we choose only the Nembutsu of faith in Amida (Amida Dharma/the Primal Vow).

10. To take refuge in the Sangha means that we take refuge in those who have received faith (shinjin) in Amida Buddha in the present life and whose future birth in the Pure Land is thus assured. By taking refuge in them we wish to be like them, we consider them to be our teachers and fellow travelers on the path, our brothers and sisters in Amida Dharma.

11. Those who haven't received faith yet should look for the company of those who are firm in faith, listen to their explanations and wish to become persons of settled faith themselves.

12. We do not take refuge in those who share false views or views that are not in accordance with the teachings of the sutras and the Masters of our tradition as they are explained in this book.

13. Amida Dharma (Jodo Shinshu) Sangha is composed only of those who fully accept the teaching on Amida Buddha as taught by Shakyamuni and the Masters of our tradition and as it is explained in this book. It also contains those who have faith (shinjin) or sincerely aspire to faith.

14. Those who do not have shinjin (faith) yet can also become members of the Sangha, if they sincerely aspire to shinjin and accept the teaching on Amida Buddha as true. However, the object of our refuge is the Sangha in

its aspect of shinjin (Arya Sangha), that is, practitioners who have a settled faith (shinjin) already. When those who are not yet established in faith wish to enter the Jodo Shinshu Sangha, they take refuge in this shinjin aspect of the Sangha.

15. The Three Refuges are, as the term implies, a refuge but also an engagement, a vow and a commitment, that from now on we will forever take refuge in Amida Buddha (and automatically in all Buddhas), we will only listen and accept the Dharma about Him, and we'll become persons who entrust ourselves to Him.

16. When we say "I take refuge in the Buddha" it means only in the Buddha, when we say, "I take refuge in the Dharma" it means only in the Dharma, and when we say, "I take refuge in the Sangha" it means only in the Sangha. The Three Refuges are exclusive vows. One should stop any non-Buddhist religious activities after receiving the Three Refuges. If one prays to non-Buddhist divine figures, engages in non-Buddhist practices and has non-Buddhist religious teachers from whom one receives teachings and instructions, that person breaks the refuge vows and from then on he/she can no longer be considered a Buddhist.

17. No matter how impressive the stories or the miracles of the non-Buddhist paths are, let us not be deceived by them as none of them are based on the true reality, but on different degrees of illusion. Because these non-Buddhist religions rely on unenlightened gods or spirits or on their limited mental

capacities, none of the non-Buddhist teachers can escape wrong views. This is why a true disciple of Amida, Shakyamuni and all Buddhas should only accept religious instructions from Buddhist teachers and never follow non-Buddhist teachings that are, in one form or another, wrong views.

Also, true follower must not worship non-Buddhist deities and not rely on superstitions, lucky days, favorable or unfavorable times.

Fascicle 13

Two wrong views that must be avoided

- 1.Among the wrong views not accepted in Buddhism are the two extremes of nihilism and eternalism. The first states that only the material world exists and denies rebirth or life after death, and the second contains elements such as faith in an eternal god who is the creator, ruler, and judge of the world. Both visions contradict the law of cause and effect (karma), as well as the Buddhist explanations of the world, and should not be followed by Buddhist disciples.
- 2.Sons and daughters of True Dharma, do not be fooled by the nihilistic and materialistic teachings! No one is just body and matter! The body is the vehicle of consciousness, arising from the karma of past lives. Our consciousness (mind stream) is only carried by the body, covered by it, influenced and limited by it, but it is certainly not the body.
- 3.The body resembles a machine that operates automatically if it is provided with sufficient fuel like food, water, and air. This machine has needs similar to any device or car that has to be sheltered from rain and other physical elements. The body is sustained by food and water, it is also washed and clothed, but nevertheless all of these things are not needed by the mind. Who can clothe his mind and give it water to drink? Then, how could we say that only our bodies exist when we see that the mind is different from the body!

4. The consciousness or mindstream "permeates" the body, attaches itself to it and identifies with it, which is why we experience physical sensations of pain or pleasure. This consciousness is limited by the body, so that our vision becomes filtered by the eyes, ears, nose and other parts of the body. After death, however, the mindstream (it is called mindstream because it changes constantly due to different desires and karmic impulses) is carried by another vehicle or body and continues its journey in different realms of existence. Only if you have faith in Amida Buddha can this unenlightened mindstream naturally and spontaneously turn into a Buddha, freed from birth and death.

5. Fear of death arises from attachment to the body and identification with it. Life, in the general acceptance of the world, is the functioning of the body from birth to death. But this period when you have your present form and you are carried by this vehicle (body) is only part of an endless change. So relax and do not let yourself be overwhelmed by the fear of death because of the materialistic visions that are so widespread today. Just look at your bodies carefully and you will realize that you are different from them.

6. Sons and daughters of True Dharma, do not be fooled by the wrong views of eternalism that propagate the idea of an eternal God who is the creator and judge of the world!

No one can be the creator of samsaric universes because samsara itself is the common dream of all unenlightened beings. If somebody was the creator of this world it

means that he is the only one guilty of all its evils and sufferings.

Buddha, the supreme Teacher, tells us that nothing appears without karma and that we are born in a world that is the manifestation and effect of our actions and delusions. No one can say that he created this world unless he is filled with the sin of arrogance and megalomania.

7. No one can be the supreme judge of samsaric beings because they automatically receive the effects of their own actions, thoughts, and words through the natural law of karma (the law of cause and effect).

8. Just like humans, other beings too are dominated by the desire for power. Many spirits or gods suffer from the need for attention, wanting to be revered and worshiped by others, thus creating religions to satisfy their evil egos. Because of this deluded desire they fool people with miracles and false revelations in order to manipulate and exploit them.

Having an imperialist mentality, they ask other beings to worship them and submit to them exclusively and unconditionally. These beings also lie by trying to convince others that they are the creators of the world and all beings. In this way, they make others depart from the correct teaching of karma as the origin of the diversity of samsaric beings and realms of existence.

9. By gathering other spirits around them, they create a retinue of subjected beings ready to serve their interests with which they share the riches and benefits of their

state of existence acquired through the karma of other lives or the offerings of the believers who worship them. Some of these so-called supreme gods consume the vital essence of the blood of the victims sacrificed on their behalf or the aromas offered in the houses of prayer dedicated to them.

Ignorant people end up wanting to be born after death close to these jealous and domineering spirits or deities, which sometimes happens because of karmic ties, but what they do not know is that the beings they worship are unenlightened and will die at some point (like any other deluded samsaric being) when the karma that propelled them to that state of existence is exhausted.

10. Powerful celestial demons of illusions called Maras keep these spirits and deities under their control and maintain their dreams of grandeur, or they delude themselves because of their own mind obscurations.

11. How pitiful is the fate of these deities and spirits who think they are all-powerful and creators of the world! What immense negative karma they accumulate by deceiving others! If they and their worshipers were to truly repent and turn their minds toward Amida Dharma, then they would attain true happiness and deliverance.

12. Disciples of the Buddha should never receive in their hearts any kind of unenlightened beings, especially those who consider themselves as supreme gods, rulers, creators, and judges of the world. They must not take refuge in them, don't pray to them, don't worship them, don't make contracts with them.

They should also not despise such beings but wish them to repent and attain faith in Amida Buddha.

There is indeed no one, no matter how evil or ignorant, that has not been at some point, in the beginningless past, our father or mother and therefore, we must try to look at them with compassion and to wish only what is good for them.

Fascicle 14

The twelve moral precepts

1. Amida Dharma is neither an instrument to justify blind passions nor institutionalize them as normal behavior. Indeed, in its saving activity, Amida Buddha makes no distinction between virtuous and non-virtuous people. But making no distinction, out of Great Compassion, between them, saving them and leading them to His Pure Land does not mean that He supports or encourages evil. It is extremely important to not confuse being saved as you are with the idea that all your actions are now worthy and good or that the Buddhas agree with them. Amida saves us because we are incapable and miserable, destined to be reborn in hell or other lower realms of existence if we were left alone, at the mercy of the consequences of our deeds and because He has great compassion for all beings, but not because He agrees with our evil deeds! Instead of praising and justifying our blind passions, we should be ashamed of them and be grateful for the unconditional help offered by Amida Buddha.

2. Everybody should try, even if he does not succeed, to observe the twelve moral precepts. These show how all Buddhas would like us to behave towards other beings, whether they are human beings or in other forms of existence.

3. The first moral precept:
You should not yourself kill any being nor encourage others to kill, kill by expedient means, praise killing,

rejoice at witnessing killing, or kill through incantations or deviant mantras. You must not wish somebody's death and do not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of killing. You should not make abortion, do not praise abortion and do not encourage others to make abortions.

You should nurture a mind of compassion and filial piety, always devising expedient means to rescue and protect all beings.

4. The second moral precept:

Do not eat any kind of meat and do not encourage others to eat meat. Do not approve or praise meat-eating.

You must not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of eating meat. This is because all beings have been, throughout past lives, our parents, brothers, and sisters and because the consumption of meat encourages the killing of even more beings. You should nurture a mind of filial piety towards all beings and encourage others to think the same.

5. The third moral precept:

You should not yourself steal, praise stealing, or encourage others to steal, steal by expedient means, and steal by means of incantation or deviant mantras.

Do not rejoice at witnessing the act of stealing.

You must not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of stealing. You should not steal any valuables or possessions, even those belonging to ghosts and spirits or thieves and robbers, be they as small as a needle or blade of grass.

Be honest and encourage others to be honest and never steal.

6. The fourth moral precept:

You should not practice sexual misconduct nor encourage others to practice sexual misconduct. Do not cheat on your woman or man, do not desire the woman of another man, nor the man of another woman, do not have sex with the woman of another man, or the man of another woman. If you are born as a man, you may have sex only with someone who is a woman by birth and if you are born as a woman, you may have sex with someone who is a man by birth.

No one should have gay or lesbian sex.

Do not have sex with those below the normal age to start their sex life, with non-human beings, with your own parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and first cousins. Do not have sex with those who have taken vows of sexual abstinence.

Do not encourage prostitution and do not go to prostitutes.

Do not have sex in inappropriate places, that is, in temples, outside the house, near sacred objects, near bodies or in cemeteries. Don't have sex at the wrong time, that is, during the day. Do not have sex in the wrong holes, i.e. those that are not made for sex, such as mouth and anus. Do not have sexual relations that cause injury or in ways that are physically or mentally harmful. Don't rape anybody. Do not rejoice at seeing any kind of sexual misconduct, and do not promote or approve sexual misconduct. Do not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of sexual misconduct.

Encourage all beings to have a right sexual behavior and protect the normal union between man and woman.

7.The fifth moral precept:

You should not practice wrong speech nor encourage others to practice wrong speech. Do not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of wrong speech. Do not use untrue words, do not lie by any means, do not encourage others to lie, do not approve lying, and do not enjoy hearing lies. Do not lie indirectly by physical or mental means. An example of a lie by physical means is to lie by shaking your head or by other gestures of the body. An example of a lie by mental means is when someone who made a mistake is silent if asked who is guilty.

Do not lie about your spiritual attainments. Do not use aggressive and harmful language. Don't curse, don't insult and don't swear anybody.

Don't boast about yourself and don't denigrate others. Don't gossip, don't engage in frivolous or idle talk. Open your mouth only if you have something useful to say, if what you say helps beings on the Path to liberation, if your intention is correct and unselfish, if you can speak kindly, and if it is the right time.

Encourage all beings to have a right speech.

8.The sixth moral precept:

Do not drink alcohol or consume any addictive intoxicants that blur your mind. Do not give or sell alcohol or any other addictive and intoxicating substances that blur your mind. Do not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of the consumption and

sale of any type of alcohol and intoxicants, because they can be the causes of all types of sins. Do not approve, encourage or praise the consumption of alcohol and intoxicants. Encourage beings to have a balanced life, and to keep their minds clear.

9. The seventh moral precept:

Do not to earn your living from hunting, fishing, breeding, killing or selling animals and humans, nor from slavery, prostitution, the production and sale of weapons or poisons, and from any activity that affects the mind and body of sentient beings. Do not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of these activities. Do not encourage others to do these activities or earn their living from them. Do not approve them and do not praise them.

Advise all beings to earn their living without hurting others.

10. The eight moral precept:

Don't be greedy and stingy. Do not encourage others to be greedy and stingy. Do not approve or praise greed and stinginess. Do not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of greed and stinginess.

Be generous, help others and encourage all beings to be generous and to care for one another in a true spirit of friendship and filial piety.

11. The ninth moral precept:

Don't be angry and don't hate anybody. Don't encourage others to hate and be angry. Do not create the causes,

conditions, methods or karma of anger and hatred. Don't be aggressive with other beings and don't hit them.

Encourage beings to be calm, loving, and reconcile with one another.

12. The tenth moral precept:

Do not destroy your family and do not encourage others to destroy their families. Do not create the causes, methods or karma of destroying your family or other people's families. Do not neglect your parents and elders in the family. Don't neglect your children. The man should respect his woman and the woman should respect her man. Parents should respect their children and children should respect their parents. Take care of your family, protect them, and provide them with food, shelter and everything they need. Offer them Dharma and help them to entrust themselves to Amida Buddha.

Encourage all beings to care for their family, to live in harmony with one another, and to have faith in Amida Buddha.

Think that all beings have been your parents, brothers and sisters in the course of countless lifetimes since the beginningless past.

13. The eleventh moral precept:

Do not denigrate your spiritual teachers and colleagues in the Sangha and do not encourage others to do so.

Look upon your spiritual teachers as your own parents and your colleagues in the Sangha as your spiritual brothers and sisters. If you are a teacher you should regard your students as your own children and as your

spiritual brothers and sisters, and do not consider yourself to be superior to them.

You should not have negative thoughts towards Sangha teachers and colleagues and do not cause them any harm, neither in deed nor in word. Respect them and help them when needed. Contribute to the well-being of your spiritual family and ensure that an atmosphere of learning and devotion is preserved. Do not bring your worldly concerns, blind passions and personal opinions to the Sangha and do not create divisions within the community.

You should not have spiritual teachers who follow non-Buddhist paths and do not entrust in Amida. You should not encourage others to have this kind of teachers.

Do not create the causes, methods, or karma of the above sins against spiritual teachers and colleagues.

Encourage all beings to respect their teachers and colleagues in the Sangha.

14. The twelfth moral precept:

You should not follow and promote views that are against Buddhist teaching. Do not encourage others to follow or promote them.

Do not create the causes, methods or karma of adhering to visions that are against Buddhist teaching.

Regard the Buddhist teaching as supreme among all religions and teachings of the world, and in such a way you should present it to other beings. Never place the Buddha on the same level with other non-Buddhist spirits or deities. Don't put the sign of equality between Dharma and non-Buddhist teachings. Do not mix Buddhist teaching with elements of other religions and

teachings. Do not slander and denigrate the Dharma. Do not encourage others to slander and denigrate the Dharma.

Encourage all beings to follow the Buddha-Dharma exclusively, to have faith in Amida Buddha, say His Name, and wish to be born in His Pure Land.

15. The Amida Dharma follower should try to lead a moral life but never think that if he fails in this attempt he is abandoned by Amida Buddha. Also, he should not look down on those who break any of the twelve precepts because there is no one who is without error.

16. With great love and great compassion, Amida Buddha regards all beings as His own children and does not discriminate between the good and the evil, wishing to bring them all to His Pure Land. However, the only ones He cannot save, because they themselves close the gates of salvation, are those who deny His existence and the existence of His Pure Land, those who slander and denigrate the Dharma, who promote and adhere to non-Buddhist views in violation of the twelfth precept and the meaning of refuge in Buddha and Dharma, as well as those who cannot hear the true teaching because they do not listen to Buddhist teachers with faith in Amida but follow heretics or teachers of non-Buddhist religions, contrary to the instructions of the eleventh precept and the meaning of refuge in the Sangha. These people are not punished or excluded by Amida, but they self-exclude themselves, severing any karmic connection with Amida and His Dharma.

17. So, do everything you can in your daily life to live up to the twelve precepts, but do not feel discouraged if you are not a moral person. As long as you do not cut off your ties with Amida and do not close yourself to the true teaching, you will surely be born in the Pure Land through the saving power of Amida Buddha.

18. Do not think that if you behave well today you deserve more to be born in the Pure Land and if you failed at doing something this will be a hindrance to being born there. The Pure Land and the Path to the Pure Land were created by Amida Buddha and depend on the Power of Amida, not on your so-called moral abilities. Do not think you are better than others, but humble yourself and believe you are the lowest of the low. Do not be proud, but throw yourself at the feet of Amida Buddha and thank Him for the unconditional salvation He offers to you.

19. Since Amida himself does not discriminate between the virtuous and the non-virtuous, there should be no such discrimination in the Sangha either. Anyone who comes to the temple must be welcomed if the reason for his coming there is to listen to the teaching and receive faith in Amida. The temple is not a courtroom, but a place of acceptance and faith. All those who attend the services and Dharma talks should be focused only on this, leaving aside any worldly concerns and non-Buddhist teachings. Also, they should be respectful of one another and maintain a spirit of brotherhood because they are all part of the same spiritual family.

20. There is no difference between Nembutsu said by a saint or Nembutsu said by a prostitute.
There is no difference between Nembutsu said by a virtuous person or Nembutsu said by a sinner.
There is no difference between the Nembutsu of the good and the Nembutsu of the evil.
There is no difference between the Nembutsu of the wise and the Nembutsu of the fool.
There is no difference between Nembutsu said by a god, spirit or demon and Nembutsu said by a human being.
There are no such differences because Nembutsu does not belong to them and does not depend on them.
Nembutsu is the Name of Amida Buddha which is good in itself, virtuous in itself, perfect in itself, all-powerful and all-liberating.
The mouth that says Nembutsu does not defile the Name, but the Name blesses the mouth that says it.

21. Out of love for all beings, Amida offered His Name and invited everyone to say it in faith. Amida's Name is the invincible and indestructible ship with which we cross the endless ocean of repeated births and deaths.

22. The Name of Amida sounds good on anyone's lips because the Name does not exorcise, destroy, or judge, but accepts and saves everyone as it is.

23. All beings, without any discriminations of good and evil, moral or immoral, are equally saved by Amida if they entrust to Him, say His Name and wish to be born in His Pure Land after death.

NamoAmida Bu



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